

Mental Health Commission Meetings, May 2006

*A distillation of the comments from Deaf
Participants*

What the Deaf Community Has Said

- When abuse and neglect allegations are filed, investigators have no ability to communicate with Deaf victims.
- First choice for treatment of acting out behavior is often inpatient hospitalization, in locations where sign language is not available
- The Mental Health System needs to be more “deaf friendly” and accepting of human differences in people who communicate in a manner different from the norm.

What The Deaf Community Has Said:

- Mental Health employers are not sensitive to the needs of Deaf staff members
- Deaf people need housing options that are culturally appropriate
- Interpreters are not available for Children's Services
- Communication in families is restricted because of Deafness – Family services need to be provided

What the Deaf Community Has Said

- Few mental health professionals understand the needs of people who are Deaf.
- A single, fully-staffed and culturally appropriate (adult) inpatient program needs to be established by DMH, serving psychiatric, ADA and behaviorally disordered Deaf people. Children's inpatient services need to be available for short-term, acute care kids who are Deaf
- Diagnostic errors are common because of language barriers. These errors often result in symptoms becoming worse

What the Deaf Community Has Said

- Housing Deaf people with hearing people results in isolation of the Deaf consumers.
- Isolation of Deaf people tends to make symptoms worse.
- Clinicians often gain information from family members, without receiving input from the Deaf person who has problems.
- Social workers, counselors, nurses, case managers, and physicians all need to be available to communicate directly with Deaf consumers. Interpreters should only be used as a last resort.

What the Deaf Community Has Said

- Services to Deaf people need to be centralized within regions of the State, rather than placed in each community or catchment area
- DMH needs to use available technology to reach Deaf people who are in distant areas.
- Clinicians fluent in ASL and who understand Deaf Culture are vital.
- Many Deaf people don't have access to transportation, except in larger cities where public transit is available. Services need to be mobile to serve rural areas.

What the Deaf Community Has Said

- More public education about the needs of Deaf people needs to be done.
- Deaf people tend to be victimized at a higher rate than the general population. More services to Deaf victims need to be available across the state
- Employment is a difficult challenge for anyone who is Deaf, due to resistance and lack of information in the general public. For Deaf people with mental illnesses or history of substance abuse, employment is almost impossible, without specialized service providers.
- Medicaid cuts have resulted in severe service cuts to people who are Deaf